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## APOLOGETICS IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.<sup>1</sup>

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THE edition of Butler which Mr. Gladstone and the Clarendon Press has published suggests many interesting reflections. It is pleasant to see the University of Oxford doing honor by this book to two of its most illustrious sons, one the most eminent thinker it produced in the eighteenth century, the other the most eminent statesman it has formed in the nineteenth. It is no less interesting to see the enthusiasm of one distinguished Oxonian for another, who had done so much for the formation of his mind and the vindication of his faith. Still more interesting it is to think of a statesman in his retirement concerning himself with a book of this kind and quality. Mr. Gladstone, indeed, has never been a mere politician, but has ever remained a scholar and thinker, never so absorbed in the politics which were mere questions of the hour as to forget those ideas which are the permanent problems of thought and the true roots of character. In this he has been in some respects far from singular among English statesmen. It is not skill in the expediciencies of the moment, but the possession of a lofty idealism, that distinguishes the statesman from the man of affairs. There is no principle which English history more illustrates than this, that problems, even in passing politics, are best understood when looked at in the light of large ideas and high aims. If we are unable to name Bacon a statesman, yet we cannot forget that he is the most eminent English philosopher of his day,—to say, as some have said, of all time, is to speak foolishly. Clarendon, once chancellor of the kingdom, has given us a history that will live as long as the English tongue. Bolingbroke, a narrow and reactionary Tory in an age of

<sup>1</sup> *The Works of Joseph Butler, D.C.L., Bishop of Durham.* Edited by the RIGHT HON. W. E. GLADSTONE. Two vols. At the Clarendon Press. 1896.

revolution, was yet a master of literary style, although only a shallow deist in thought, and no very profound thinker in political philosophy ; but Burke, a political philosopher if ever there was one, must not be forgotten ; while nearer our own day stand statesmen who were scholars, and minded the affairs of the state all the better that they did not neglect their own studies. We remember that one English prime minister of Queen Victoria translated Homer ; another, the " little great man " who " knew that he was right,"—Earl Russell,—was almost as active in literature as in politics ; a third, Lord Beaconsfield, was the author of some of the cleverest, most brilliant, audacious, and malicious novels of the time. The present leader of the House of Commons has distinguished himself as a writer on the philosophic questions that underlie all belief ; and Mr. Gladstone, throughout his long career, has maintained this noble characteristic of the higher English statesmen. In his early years he was absorbed in those fundamental questions which touched the relations of church and state, and he dealt with them according to primary principles ; not as mere matters of statecraft or occasional policy, but according to the idea and function of the church on the one hand, and those of the state on the other. In his maturer manhood classical studies absorbed him, and we had those delightful excursions into the world of Homer and the Homeric poems which were all the more instructive that they were in character so entirely distinct from the performances of the mere scholar. If he had not what the youngest scholar thought the only, because the newest, scientific method of inquiry into the date, the composition, the authorship, and the mythology of the Homeric poems, he yet showed an unrivaled mastery of the text and a familiarity with the world it described and illustrated which was all his own. And now in his later days he returns—though one may say from a maturer and higher point of view—to his earlier interests. It is less the political form and idea of religion, and more the metaphysical and ethical contents—*i. e.*, truth of it—that here interest him. There is a certain fitness in the man who began his life as an apologist for a given theory of the church in the state, ending his life as the editor of

the greatest of all the apologies of the Christian religion ever written in the English tongue.

The works of Butler fall, of course, into two classes,—the apologetic and the expository, or the *Analogy* and the *Sermons*. The popular judgment has dealt very differently with these from what their respective merits deserved. The *Analogy* has the much greater occasional, the *Sermons* the much more permanent, significance. In the *Analogy* he appears as the apologist, in the *Sermons* he appears as the ethical philosopher. The antecedents of the *Analogy* are English ; the antecedents of the *Sermons* are classical and specifically Stoic. In the *Analogy* Butler writes as the thinker who has assimilated his own age, who assumes the beliefs as to religion it accepted as axiomatic ; and on this basis he erects a criticism of those opinions he considered false and a justification of those he considered true. In the *Sermons* he handles the great ethical problems of human nature and human life, the principles contained in nature and enforced by it, the instincts and the impulses that regulated conduct and determined choice. In the *Analogy* he speaks like the student of current literature, who has before him the intellectual illusions, agreements, differences, and disputations, of his own society. In the *Sermons* he speaks like one who is before all and above all the preacher of duty ; but his ideal of duty may be described as Stoicism baptized into Christ. As an ethical thinker there is only one man in his century with whom he can be compared—Kant. And the comparison need not at all be to his disadvantage. Butler is as characteristically English as Kant is German. Their problems are, in a sense, the same ; but the Englishman has not the elaborate and highly technical terminology of the German ; and the German has not the intensely and directly practical speech and purpose of the Englishman. There is nothing, indeed, in Butler that corresponds to the schematism and systematization of the Critiques, whether of the Pure or the Practical Reason. If there had been, many of the questions Kant discussed would have been either superseded or differently stated and developed. But just as little is there anything in the German to correspond to that vindication of religion which is

better given in the Sermons than in the Analogy by the dispassionate statements and cogent enforcement of its cardinal ethical principles and duties. To Kant, indeed, religion was only a form of ethical philosophy—the apprehension of our duty as a divine command; but to Butler ethics are of the very essence of religion, and never fully realized without it or apart from it. The ethical system of Butler in its relation to religion seems to me, therefore, of a higher and more permanent significance than that of Kant; and we are exceedingly pleased to find that this edition does him the justice of sending out the Analogy and the Sermons together, edited and annotated with equal care. The Analogy, because of its apologetical and polemical force, has overshadowed the Sermons; but the Sermons have the excellence of being, both as regards form and matter, more permanently valid and valuable.

The difference of source, or, as it were, of historical antecedents, may explain a difference in principle between the Analogy and the Sermons, which I have stated elsewhere, but which Mr. Gladstone criticises as incorrect. The doctrine of probability, which lies at the basis of the Analogy, has seemed to me inconsistent with the doctrine of authority, which is the very essence of Butler's theory of conscience. And there is more than an intellectual inconsistency between these two parts; there is what we may call a genealogical difference, with all the distinctions two quite separate genealogies always imply. The metaphysical or psychological basis of the doctrine of probability is the philosophy of Locke. The philosophical basis of the theory of conscience is the Stoical doctrine of human nature. Locke's psychology explains what may be termed Butler's agnosticism, his great sense of human ignorance, of the incompetence of human faculty, the need of being guided by those probabilities which Locke had so carefully discussed and so truly deduced from his own principles and assumptions. But the authority of conscience expresses the Stoical belief in nature, the nature that is in man which man is bound to realize, which holds within it the law according to which he ought to live, that law which is, in a sense, the highest man is and the highest he

can reach. These two positions seem to me not only historically, but metaphysically different; and their conflict had a marked influence both on Butler's life and the life of a man who owed even more to him than Mr. Gladstone,—the late Cardinal Newman. Butler, and we say it with all deference and respect, never felt quite so sure of his beliefs as he wished to be, and we may describe the logical tendency that governed his life as a movement progressively towards outward authority in religion, *i. e.*, in search of supports other and stronger than mere probability. This was the secret of those accusations as to "squinting at Rome" which shadowed the later days of his life; they meant that, just like Newman afterwards, he was feeling for something kindlier and surer than probability supplied.

We are thus very doubtful, indeed, if the Analogy, which was so cogent to others, was ever entirely conclusive to Butler himself; but we think that his moral doctrine had a force and a finality which his Analogy was entirely without. We have spoken as to the difference in the historical antecedents of the Analogy and the Sermons. This leads us to say that as the antecedents of the Analogy were so thoroughly English, it can be read with thorough intelligence only by a man who knows the literature of the time. Butler read much, but he did not read many books, and he was signally sparing in his references to those he had read, but was thoroughly steeped in the thought of his time. To the man, therefore, who knows its literature his pages are alive with allusions. But it is more contemporary literature and thought that occupy him than what may be termed the classical works of the philosophers of history. Just as Locke took his notion as to what was meant by "innate ideas" from Lord Herbert of Cherbury rather than Descartes, so Butler had more in view the crowd of almost nameless writers of his own day than the great masters in philosophy. But these writers he had studied thoroughly. There is hardly a suggestion of a constructive kind to be found either in the deistic or the apologetic literature of his own, or of the immediately preceding, period that is not taken up by him and worked into his scheme. But while it is this that makes, as it were, the warp and the woof of its thought, the weaving of the

two into the web of argument and illustration is due to his own strong personality. It is this that makes a book of historical notes to Butler at once so difficult and so necessary. He appropriates phrases, almost sentences, without acknowledging his authority or giving any clue to whence they were derived. His contemporaries knew his sources and did not need references, but we walk rather in darkness when the references are withheld. It is full of interest to see how he takes Matthew Tindal's *Revealed Religion* as a republication of *Natural Religion*, and turns his argument right round about, accepting his theory of distinction and relation in order to the vindication rather than the supersession of revealed by natural religion. It is also interesting to see how he takes John Foster—the Foster of Pope's couplet:

"Let honest Foster, if he will, excel  
Ten metropolitans in preaching well"—

as to the difficulty of reconciling the universal destiny of the Christian religion with its local and particular diffusion, and incorporates it with his own complex and finely articulated structure. We are not inclined to lay so much stress on his obligations to Berkeley, for he did not—as Berkeley did—deal with his problem as metaphysical, but as ethical. In a word, Berkeley's problem was as to the source and process of knowledge; but Butler's problem had more relation to conduct as affected by faith. He found religion in man, but he also found that to its development and completion religion from above man was necessary. And though the analogy rested on the great conception as to the correspondence between the two worlds,—the transcendental and the empirical,—he rather assumed the correspondence than attempted any discussion as to how they were related in the process and laws of knowledge. But only by the history of the thought he inherited and used can either method or argument be properly appreciated.

We may describe the argument of the Analogy as occasional, and with the argument the method was inextricably bound up. Analogy is possible only provided there are two things which can be as exactly compared as could be his natural and

revealed religion. He did not invent the idea of either. He hardly needed to define the terms or to describe their respective meanings. He could assume them because they were the familiar commonplaces of the controversy in which he intervened. "Natural religion" had nothing of nature in it, and very little of religion. The phrase sprang out of Lord Herbert of Cherbury's attempt to discover what ideas were common to all religions, in order that a common substratum might be discovered and regarded as the very essence of all. This notion came to be formulated into a sort of philosophical doctrine, which might be termed the system of abstract beliefs proper to human nature, or the religious ideas native to man. It had on one side of it the value of the older theory of innate ideas, or the later intuitive principles of philosophy, *i. e.*, it intended to build on the catholic and necessary beliefs of mind; but it had also, on the other side of it, a more historical idea,—that of the primordial worship or faith which had belonged to primitive or aboriginal man. Now, both these meanings mix in Butler. He uses the phrase now in the one sense and now in the other; and the usage is not always consistent. If Mr. Gladstone had entered into the history of the idea and the phrase, he would have done something to make Butler more intelligible. Taken in its philosophical sense, the truth of natural religion was necessary to revealed; taken in its historical sense the corruption and the insufficiency of natural religion constituted the need for revealed. In the literature before Butler both these arguments have their place. Samuel Clarke in his correspondence with Leibnitz said: "As Christianity presupposes the truth of natural religion, whatever tends to discredit the latter must have a proportional effect in weakening the authority of the former." According to this, the supernatural had its basis in the natural; and the truth of the natural had to be maintained in order to the truth of the supernatural.

Here we have the intellectual basis for the "analogy." The two systems are so far parallel that each can be invalidated or vindicated through the other. But now between Clarke and Butler an important incident had occurred. Matthew Tindal had published his *Christianity as Old as Creation*, and had developed



the parallel to such an identity as made revealed religion a superfluous addition to natural. And so he argued that where the one went beyond the other, it was to be doubted or disbelieved. Now, over against Tindal and men of his kind the "analogy" was the most invincible of all *argumenta ad homines*. It showed that the so-called system of nature had as many and as grave defects as the so-called system of revelation. And Butler proceeded so to weld the two together as to make the two systems into one system, which was more credible as a whole than either constituent was credible apart.

I have spoken of the argument of the Analogy as occasional; it is this because the assumptions on which it proceeds and which give to it all its validity were strictly relevant to its own time and are not at all considered or accepted in ours. For one thing it is addressed to deists, and the deist is no more. The men who admit the idea of God do not now stand where the deists stood; they go further, they admit more—thanks in great part to the Analogy—or they deny more—thanks in great part to the Analogy again. Nor is the idea of natural religion today what it was then; it has ceased to be a philosophical system which could stand over against another and more elaborate system called revealed religion; it has become our notion of what primitive or savage people believe; it is a system which has ceased to be our own; it is the customs, the rites, and the institutions of those in an earlier stage of civilization. Between natural religion, as now conceived, and revealed, no argument from analogy would have any cogency, for the system is no longer accepted by the men the apologist addressed and assumed by him as an admitted basis of argument. And revealed religion has also undergone its change; it is no longer conceived as the very rounded and finished sort of thing that Butler imagined. His interpretation of certain of its doctrines are not ours, his reading of its history is not exactly the reading of scholars of today; and so with the basis gone from under it and all the rational relations between the two things changed, the argument has lost its cogency and speaks rather to those who have an academic purpose in view or to those whose interests are mainly historical.

This does not involve any censure upon the argument as used by Butler and addressed to his own day; it simply states a fact in present experience. The thought that needs to be satisfied now is at once more radical in philosophy and more critical in history. The agnostic or the physicist has replaced the deist. To men who do not know that God is, an argument that assumes his being speaks in vain. The men who think of religion as natural today do not conceive it as a system of duties, as a belief in a future state, or as a method of retribution and reward, but simply as so many phenomena in the life of peoples, to be studied by the archæologist or the historian.

The new analogy must be broader than the old, be as just to knowledge and speculation at the end of the nineteenth century as Butler's was to knowledge and speculation at the beginning of the eighteenth. The lesson he has to teach is that we be as honest as he was. His personal example is one of the great things he has bequeathed to us in his book. Mr. Gladstone well says, the method of the Analogy is of greater value than its argument; and we may add that Butler's attitude of mind, alike to method and argument, is of greater value than either. The signal veracity of the man as a thinker and a writer is above praise. "There are many men," he says, "who have a strong curiosity to know what is said, who have no curiosity to know what is true." He himself was a conspicuous example of a man who had the utmost curiosity to know what was said in order that he might discover and determine how far it was true. This is a very rare quality in an apologist, but it is characteristic of Butler, the moralist; and out of it all his best qualities as thinker and teacher come.

The influence of Butler on later thought is not quite so easy a question as it is sometimes assumed to be. He indeed marked the end of one great period of the deistic controversy. Its first half was largely concerned with the idea of natural religion. In Toland, Collins, and Tindal the discussion had relation to this natural religion as adequate to all the needs of men, and to the contradictions involved in the notion of revealed. Butler, in summing up the argument in his judicial and conclusive fashion,

brought the case to an issue and an end. From this time forward the controversy became, far more than it had previously been, a question as to the evidences of the Christian religion. These were of several kinds. They concerned the veracity, the authenticity, and therefore the credibility of the New Testament writings. In this field the greatest and most memorable work was achieved by Nathaniel Lardner; Jeremiah Jones, with his *History of the Canon*, moves in the same region; Paley's *Horæ Paulinæ* is the familiar and popular exponent of the same line. Miracles also played a great part. Their sufficiency was proved; their credibility and reality, their evidential value to the man on the street, if not in the study, discussed. David Hume may have had much to do with one special form that the discussion of miracles assumed. But it was older than he; it was in the air and continued down almost to our own day. Then there was the evidence of twelve honest men beginning with Sherlock's *Trial of the Witnesses* and running on to its culmination in Paley. These are interesting as indicating the change which may be said to date from Butler, though, of course, Sherlock's book was earlier than the *Analogy*.

We feel, therefore, that Butler's influence in the eighteenth century may, so far as religious or even literary, be easily exaggerated. To take Mr. Gladstone's instance, it is certain that there are far deeper and more ineffaceable traces of Coleridge in the literature of the nineteenth century than of Butler in that of the eighteenth. And such traces as we find are more of the moralist than of the apologist. One of the curious things pointed out by Thomas Reid and Dugald Stewart is that "Butler made a deeper and more lasting impression in Scotland than in any other part of the island." This is evident, not only from the correspondence with Lord Kames, but also from the anxiety of Hume to submit his *Treatise of Human Nature* to Butler and to win his approval for his *Essays*; and from what Dugald Stewart has well indicated,—that the fundamental idea of Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Settlements* was suggested by Butler. Stewart also happily shows how frequently a single sentence of Butler shatters a whole ethical system. Thus Hobbes' account of

*pity* as "the imagination or fiction of *future* calamity to ourselves proceeding from the sense of another man's calamity" is proved futile by Butler's remark: "If it were just, it would follow that the most fearful temper would be the most compassionate." As Reid and Smith and Stewart had used Butler, so also, as Mr. Gladstone recognizes, did Chalmers, whose *Bridgewater Treatise* and *Natural Theology* and *Prelections on the Analogy* were but modifications of Butler's fundamental position. But it is remarkable that in all these cases it is the ethical doctrine in the Sermons and in the Analogy, more than the purely intellectual or philosophical principles of the latter, that are potent and influential.

So here again we reach the conclusion that the positive and ethical doctrine of Butler has a permanency which has been denied to an apologetic which was so largely agnostic.

The relation of Butler to contemporary and subsequent thought suggests a very interesting question as to the various conditions that make for cogency, whether in apologetics or in criticism. The defense of the Christian, or indeed of any, religion is not merely a work of literature; it is a much larger and more serious thing. The course of the deist controversy in England forms a remarkable contrast to the history of the parallel movement in France. The two were indeed closely related; the English was, in a sense, the source of the French deism. The bosom at which both were suckled was the philosophy of Locke, but of the children the English was the elder and formative, the French was the younger and more imitative, yet incalculably the more potent. Voltaire did not deduce his deism directly from Locke, he learned it from disciples less reverent and more audacious than the master. Nothing so astonished him during his English residence as the freedom with which religion was treated. He found just as Butler did that unbelief was fashionable; "Christianity was not so much as a subject of inquiry;" it had been "at length discovered to be fictitious." So Mr. Toland had proved that "Christianity was not mysterious." "The Sect of Free Thinkers" was the church of the wits, the synagogue of the socially select. Anthony Collins discoursed of

their wisdom, and it needed the audacity of a Bentley to satirize their freedom as "thinking and judging as you find," "which every inhabitant of bedlam practices every day, as much as any of our illustrious sect." To him, indeed, their wise men were "idiot evangelists;" but to Voltaire they represented letters, culture, the men of sense. Bolingbroke, Pope's "guide, philosopher; and friend," became Voltaire's master in deism; and he went home to France to preach what he had learned in England. But the course of the controversy was as different as possible in the two countries. In England the victory was with the apologists; in France with the assailants of faith. It was not that in the one case deism was intellectually outmatched, while in the other case it had all the superiority of mind. The English deist was in the matter of intellect quite the equal of the English apologist. Hume was more subtle than Butler. Gibbon was more learned and ponderous than Lardner or Paley. Tom Paine was a greater master of English and of argument than Beattie. Yet, in spite of the number and quality of their opponents, the apologists triumphed; when the century ended the Christian religion was far more strongly entrenched in the reason and heart of the English people than it had been when the century began. But in France there was another story. When the century opened it was still the great age of Louis XIV, where the church was as illustrious in intellect, in learning, and in eloquence as the state was in regal dignity, in military prowess, and in skillful statesmanship. When the century closed the Revolution had come, the terror had followed, kingdom and church had together perished. And to this catastrophe no cause had contributed more potently than the French movement which corresponded to the English deism.

Now why this remarkable difference? To examine all its roots and reasons would carry us much too far. But the main reason is one which is not without its moral for our own day. In England the political and social conditions were such that the religious was not a civil question, but rather one intellectual and ethical. The state had ceased to expect uniformity of worship and belief, and to enforce it by civil disabilities and

pains. The first step towards toleration had been taken, and parliament had practically recognized that the civil and the ecclesiastical society, the state and the church, were not identical and coextensive. And it so happened that the political situation, especially as concerned the kingship, was such as to reduce to silence the only party in the state who could have resisted the principle of liberty. The old high churchman who believed in the divine right of the king, and the duty of passive obedience, could not preach his doctrine in the face of the Hanoverian succession, or apply it to a sovereign who reigned by the will of the people and not of right divine. And so for the first time in English history since "the spacious days of great Elizabeth" religion had ceased to be a civil concern, and become the concern of the religious, a matter for the reason and the conscience, for the mind and the heart. And thus it was freely discussed, treated on its own merits, argued for, argued against, tried by logic, tested by evidence, dealt with as if it were of all subjects the one most germane to the intellect, the one thing absolutely common and accessible to all men. And the result stands written broad upon the face of the century: in a fair argument and on a free field religion easily and completely won.

But the situation in France was exactly the converse. In 1688 toleration began its reign with Dutch William in England; in 1685 Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes, and began the reign of intolerance. Church and state were henceforth so bound together as to be in a sense one body breathing fateful breath. There was no greater enemy of civil freedom than the church; no more vigilant foe of religious liberty than the state. Each confirmed the other in the policy that was most disastrous to its good. And so it happened that the free-thinking spirit which had returned from England incarnated in Voltaire saw that it could not teach religion without offending the state; and so it had to strike at the state in order to get at the religion which had become the very soul of the tyrannical sway. And there was no lack of provocation to assault. In popular feeling, dislike of Voltaire, the mocker, has hidden from us how much there was to justify his mockery, and the really great ends it was often used

to serve. We forget that he was no mere spirit who denied, but one who strongly affirmed where affirmation was at once most necessary and most dangerous. He who loves freedom ought never to forget the services Voltaire rendered to the cause he loves. On behalf of Jean Calas, and in the name of justice and truth, he fought the whole collective bigotry of France, and prevailed. He confronted a church that in the age of Louis the Well-Beloved dared to persecute, even though so many of her priests and princes had ceased to believe; and by his arguments, his scorn, his bold mockery, he gained, almost single-handed, his splendid victory. And here was the real reason why in France religious apologetics never had a chance. The tongue of the church was tied, she had to defend the indefensible, and so was silent; while the assault was delivered against the whole broad face of two flagrant offenders whose alliance made them appear as one: a state that in its anxiety to repress a liberty which the church feared, forgot its own people; and a church that, in its desire to sanction and support a state which tried so hard to serve it, neglected its own duties and was faithless to the very end of its being. It was the civil independence of the question they discussed that made English apologetics so completely victorious; it was the league of church and state in France, so mischievous to the good of both, so provocative in both of evil, that contributed to their common and disastrous overthrow.

The moral is obvious. The successful apologetic of an age is to be found in its collective religion. The church which forsakes its high vocation as the prophet of God for the most splendid and profitable alliance obtains ascendancy in one generation only to lose in the next all she has schemed to gain, in the revolution which is sure to come as the Nemesis of forgotten responsibilities. The church lives for the truth, and to be its persevering spokesman she needs to be free.